Letter. No. 10. | Lieut. V. H. Massey. Infantry Base Depot. Egypt.

Tuesday. Dec 14th.

My darling sweetheart.

I am still in a very pleasant flutter, after the glad & wonderful news of yesterday - that you are well. As I am thinking about how to begin this letter, & as I do start, I am very conscious of the fact that this letter may arrive before yesterday's, in this case, as & when it happens in other cases, you will be somewhat baffled as to exactly what is going on. But you will always be able to gather, from the number of the letter, when this is happening, & so when it does, you will have to make due allowance, & fill in the missing bits yourself, until they arrive. I had not intended to write again until Thursday, when Frank would have arrived back with the full text of your cable, or it even might have arrived itself. But, after the lifting of the load from my mind, yesterday, I have felt so well, & so comparatively happy today, that I must start again already. It has made a wonderful change for me, & I now walk about the place at twice the pace, & feel good, & say good morning to people. I have thought about you incessantly today, as I always do, but in quite a different way. I keep on saying that I am certain no harm can come to you, & I really do feel that - but still I was very frightened from time to time. But enough of that. It is also such a help to know where you are, & I can begin to imagine - probably quite wrongly - what you are doing, & what your life consists of. I wonder how wrong I shall be, when your letters arrive & at last - I really know. I feel afraid somehow, to put down in this letter what I do imagine, in case, when you get this letter, things are not so pleasant for you as I feel they are. You understand what I mean, darling one? But I do feel & hope & pray that your life is interesting & satisfactory, & that you are managing to do things you want to do. And when your letters come, I will tell you if I have been all wrong or nearly right, or what.

Perhaps before I finish this & send it off, I shall know more about you - I ache & pine to do this.

But, until I do, I must carry on & tell you some more

about such interesting matters as I have seen & done.

Wednesday. Dec. 18th.

I fell to thinking & dreaming about you last night, & so did not get any further. A massive great fireplace has been rigged up at one side of the ante room tent, & a log fire burns all night. I put myself in front of this, & gazed into it, & felt very homesick. I then went to bed early, & looked at my photographs, & re-read for the umpteenth time, your three letters to me at Oswestry.

And now about Cairo. A few days after our arrival, we applied for & obtained leave, & decided to make the journey to Cairo – Frank & Rex & myself. We arrived up there very late on the Wednesday night, & stayed at the Continental Hotel –: this is an enormous hotel & really a very pleasant one; it is the second best hotel in the city – Shepherds being closed, until Dec 1st. They had special prices for the army, & as we only paid 6/- for bed & breakfast, this seemed very reasonable. But it had a sting in its tail, because drinks & meals & so on, were at the very best London prices – something like L'Apéritif, you remember? – & so they intended to get it all back that way. So we ate & drank elsewhere, & it all worked out quite well.

On the Thursday morning we had breakfast – & then set out for the cable office. We enlisted the aid of a dragoman – I will tell you about them later – to guide us there, but he went all wrong, & we nearly had to guide him there ourselves. Then we all sent off cables. I wonder what method you have employed. I sent my first one the expensive way, which is L.C. & costs 8/- for 17 words, & about 6d a word for extra words, that is known as the Deffered rate, & is supposed to be delivered in 24 hours. My other ones have been sent N.L.T. – night letter telegram – which costs 8/- for 25 words, & about 5d for extra words – & these are supposed to be delivered in 48 hours. We had leave until the Sunday night, & in my innocence I hoped for a reply by then, & so gave you the telegraphic address of the Hotel. I wondered since if this bamboozled you at all. We then wandered about & did some shopping, & had some lunch, with which we had some Egyptian wine at 2/- the bottle. It was not-

too good - it tasted of what you would imagine mummies would taste of, it was a medium shade of dull yellow - a rather significant shade.

After lunch, we went to the Headquarters, British Troops in Egypt, to find out about wives coming to this country. I was pretty certain by then, that such a thing was quite impossible, but I wanted to be quite certain. We saw a very pleasant sympathetic Captain, & he was able to put the lid on it completely. In fact, wives & women are being sent away, unless they have a specific job to keep them here. But it does not really matter. These shipping losses of ours are getting a bit too serious now - you could not possibly risk the journey at the moment. I do wish something more could be done about those losses - it seems so serious, & it makes you furious when you think of the cowardly & dirty methods employed to bring them about.

But, I am always thinking, darling, about how & by what means, & when & how soon, we can be in the same place together again.

On the Friday, it was very hot & lovely, so we went out to the Gezirah Sporting Club, which is about two miles outside the city. This was a very wonderful place, & contained a race course, an 18 hole golf course, tennis courts, squash courts, fives courts, a large swimming pool, a billiard room, an enormous bar, restaurants inside & outside. It cost us £1 for the day, & this included everything except food & drink. Frank & I had a round of golf in the morning - & we both played quite decently with borrowed clubs. Then we had a pleasant omelette & salad lunch, & a bask in the sun. And then a bathe. Drinks were very cheap here, & in the evening we met all sorts of people, drank so much & for so long, that we missed dinner altogether, & eventually stumbled back to the Hotel & went to bed.

On the Saturday morning, we found that whereas we had put in for four days leave, other people were arriving with five days, & so a telegram was sent to the Adjutant for permission to return on Monday. We then set out on a serious shopping expedition, as we all had many things to buy for ourselves, Christmas presents too. The shops in Cairo are excellent for most things, & in most cases very much cheaper than in England. I have blessed myself for buying the minimum of stuff at home. All sorts of people are walking about in drill suits for which they paid 5 & 6 guineas at home, looking as shady, & in many cases worse, than you saw me look in mine. I have been to an Indian tailor in the camp here, had two suits made for 36/- each, & they fit me beautifully, & I am very pleased with them. I also bought another pair of shorts, for 8/-, where P.X.'s charged 16/6. I also bought two very good open neck shirts, for 8/- each, & which the man had made for me in 24 hours. And then my suede shoes had nails popping up all over the place - as soon as one was hammered down another popped up - which was tearing all my socks & stockings to pieces - & so I bought a new pair of these - very well made, & with crêpe soles, for 25/-. Rather good, don't you think?

I then detached myself from the others, & set off by myself to find a present for you, my pretty darling. As I told you in another letter, I had set my heart on finding some really & truly beautiful & pretty & chic pants & petticoats - such as the ones we saw in Shrewsbury that day - & I did think I should be able to do this. I went to about a dozen shops & had all their stock out before me, but it was no use. I was walking along, feeling rather beaten, when I was set on by a dragoman. I think I had better tell you about dragomen now. You probably know vaguely what

they – that is guides. But they are very special guides & are appointed & receive a licence from the Government. They are supposed to be distinguished for their knowledge, honesty, & energy, propriety, cleanliness, & mastery of English – & American. But in spite of all these high sounding qualifications, they are the most tenacious people, & the most unwilling to take no for an answer. Every time you leave the hotel, one of them pounces on you & offers to show this & that & everything else – all the time proudly showing you the arm band they wear recording their official status – but even though you know exactly where you are going, & are quite determined not to use their services, & you say so firmly & from the word go, it usually requires between 50 & 100 yds before they give up.

However this one looked rather a pleasant man, he happened to mention silks, said that it would be foolish to buy such things at the bigger shops & that I would save money by going with him: so I fell for this & along we went. My dragoman, as they all are, was dressed in long flowing robes, down to the ground, a turban & carried a good long cane – & he was a big fellow, & spoke excellent English. After quite a walk, & a great deal of pleasant chat, we arrived at the shop. This was a dark little place, run by a very refined type of Egyptian, & was quite full of everything – leather bags & things, cloth, all kind of jewelry & many antiques. It was all in darkness, but lights were switched on when I arrived. I explained what I wanted, but it was the wrong kind of shop. He could only produce pieces of cloth, none of which were suitable – even if you were the sort of person to make your own lingerie things. But he was quite determined that I should buy something – & when he showed me some fancy silks, I knew that I would. & after a great deal of looking & wondering, & going

outside to look, thinking of you wearing them. I decided on the one I have sent to you. I think it is lovely. I do hope it arrives safely, that you like it as much as I do. I think a dressing gown was the one garment for this material to be made up into, otherwise I would have sewn it for you in the piece. I think, when you have shortened it, it will be a reasonable size. I then asked to look at rings, remembering yours with for a large ring. I looked at a great many garnets, but did not like any of them very much - then he produced the comparatively cheap one that I have sewn you - once again I do hope that you will like it.

This man who owned the shop was very interesting, I spent a long time there looking at his things. He had one necklace which I took a great fancy to, I have paid a small deposit on it, so that he will keep it for me, then if I do not want it, I can spend the deposit on something else. It is made of mummy beads, these are a kind of mottled dullish blue shade, shaped somewhat irregularly like this O - about that size. These are interspersed, after each mummy bead, with two or three small pearls. But these are not bright pearls, but have become dulled, fawny in colour on account of having been buried for so many thousand years. I thought it was very lovely, so did Frank, who saw it the next day. I think it would look lovely on you. Then there is the question as to whether or not it is genuine. Obviously I cannot tell, but this man is a licensed dealer in genuine antiques, he seemed to me to be very genuine himself, he seemed to be doing a good trade, it would hardly be worth his while to diddle people. The price was £5 - I would love to give it to you as a birthday present, if you would like

to have it. Will you say "purchase necklace" – or "no necklace", as the case may be, in your next cable to me.
This shopkeeper then asked me what I had seen in & around Cairo, & I was delighted that he asked me, because I then found out that Memphis, & some of the tombs are fairly near to Cairo. I therefore arranged for my dragoman – Abdul, not a particularly uncommon name – to obtain a car, & come with us the following day – & I also arranged the all in price of £2 for the three of us, which turned out to be very cheap.
In the late afternoon, I set out by myself again, & eventually found some slacks & petticoats which were quite good & pretty, & so I bought these & 2 pairs of stockings, & I hope that these will arrive safely, & met with your approval, & that there will be no trouble about duty.
I do love sending you presents, my darling – & I would love it even more if I could give them to you.
In the evening, I went to a bookshop, & spent a long time looking around, & finally bought the books I have told you about, & which I thought you would like to buy for me.
As you know, I was reading "what then shall we do" – & now I have finished it. It is a very wonderful book, & particularly interesting in view of later events in Russia. It is, of course, completely communistic, socialistic, & anti-capitalist. It seemed to me that although Tolstoy finds fault in most unerring fashion, he does not take enough trouble about giving a practical solution for the ills of such a rapidly advancing world. He spends some time in chastising our science, & artists & scientists – but as his translator points out in the preface, he later took back all he had said about art, & completely revised his views on this – so it would seem that at the time

he wrote this book, his mind had become clear about what was wrong, but was not made up about the cure. I don't know. Perhaps further excursions into the works of Tolstoy will reveal more; these should be worth making.

Great strides in art - I am reading from time to time - I think my ignorant unpractised mind, if I read it straight through, would remain ignorant. I have read Giotto & Leonardo, I have started Michelangelo. I will tell you more about this some other time.

At the moment, I am also reading Gulliver Travels. Before, I have only read this in a child's edition - about twenty odd years ago. I think it is brilliant, I am enjoying it immensely. When I have finished this letter, I shall look forward to returning to it. Another book I read on the ship was under disappointing, I meant to tell you about it before. This was the Passionate Year - by James Hilton. When I read the book Horizon, I thought it was a wonderful book, I'm told that Mr Chips is a wonderful book too - but this thing was the most shocking tripe, from beginning to end. It made me furious all the way. I know I should have stopped it or thrown it away, but you know how I cannot. But I think that shocking book has taught me a lesson, & in future I will be able to. I certainly hope so.

In the evening, we went to the Continental Cabaret. This was bloody. I thought it would be, but we felt we ought to go to one. We had quite a pleasant dinner, the price of this was alright. Then the cabaret began - This consisted of about six turns, all of which aimed at being a bit arty or something, & were just pathetic. All

this was put across by a man who reminded me of the dreadful Gilbert, & his jokes fell as flat as pancakes. We then went over to the bar, & ordered one round of drinks, which set us back about 12/-. So we had a row about that - they said it was cabaret prices - we said it was a bloody swindle - & took our hats & bells & sticks & left. We had a few drinks for a quarter the price at another place, & went to bed quite early & in good order.

Thursday. Dec. 19th.

Frank arrived back late last night, & gave me the copy of your cable, which told me about the death of your father. I am terribly sorry darling. & send my deepest sympathy to you mother & to all of you. You must have been very upset - it seems to be just one blow after another for you. He was, of course, not too well during my last few weeks in England, but I never thought of anything like this. I always got on very well with him, as you know I liked him, & he was always very good to me, & apparently liked me. You are all bound to feel very sad, & do sympathise very much, darling. But he was quite an old man & had had a long life - & during the last few years, as you have told me, he was not very kind to your mother. And he never came very near to understanding you - although I am sure he did realise that you were an exceptional person - which probably was the cause of most of his behaviour towards you.

What I am trying to say, without hurting any body's feelings, is that you & your mother & all of you, will be able to overcome this loss - & perhaps you & your mother, Peggy will be able to live together, & be very happy. I do hope your mother is alright - her heart is so apt to do things at times like these. I presume, from your cable, that she is. I have thought about writing to her, but it will be so long after it happened that she would receive the letter, & I shared

find it so difficult to know what to say. So will you please say all these things for me, as you think best?

I have no idea how things will be about money. I never quite understood what would happen when your father died, but I imagine that your mother will not be too well off. So, of course, there is no need to say it really, if you live with your mother, she must allow you to pay your share, & if it is worse than that, & the Association are still paying up & so on, you must help in any way you want to.

Pelsall Robinsons will not be the same place, after so many years, will it? And what will happen, with Grimmacombe Frank away in the army. I hope the wrong people will not get control & undo all your father's undoubtedly good work - though I think he looked ahead pretty well in that direction. There is probably not so much to get control of at the moment, but the war will end sometime.

As I said earlier in this letter, the address "Continental, Cairo", which I gave you in my first ~~letter~~ cable, did mislead you - because the rest of the address - Cheshire Regt, attd. Worcesters, R.A.S.C. A. - all the rest of it - became quite unnecessary once I had arrived in the country, & apparently it fazed the A.P.O. completely. They sent it to the cypher section to be decoded - the result was that I only received a copy, & I do not know how long it was held up. The only date on it was Dec 5th, but I can hardly believe that that was the date you sent it off, as my cables to you were sent off on the 20th & 27th Dec respectively. I wonder has your mother left Warren Fields, there has been delay in forwarding. I expect she probably has left. I hope all the other things I have addressed there, will reach you alright. Your cable was very barren of news, my

darling. I can only think that you have presumed that I have received some of your letters, therefore your news also - and/or that you became so browned off with the length of that unfortunate address, that you economised on the message. But I still do not know where you are living - & so I am now sending every thing to Radlett - or who with, & what you are doing, & so important, if you are pregnant - whether you are happy. I want to know these things so much - & so now I hope that my further cables will bring forth this news.

When I give you an address in a cable, you must not add or subtract anything. This army post business is a complicated affair, with people being shoved about here, there, & everywhere, & so the exact way in which a letter is addressed is very important, otherwise the people become misled, or even completely bored.

I will stop this now, my darling, & get it posted. And I will tell you about the remainder of our stay in Cairo, in my next letter - which I will send off very soon.

I am so happy & relieved that you are safe & well. But I am still missing you, desperately. And I am still aching to hear from you.

All my dearest love to you, my sweet darling - & many, many kisses. Harry.

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